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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001215

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ECON EAGR UZ TI

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN WARNS IT WILL CUT WATER SUPPLY TO UZBEKISTAN IN RESPONSE TO POWER CUTS, ASKS FOR USG ASSISTANCE

REF: TASHKENT 1904

CLASSIFIED BY: KENNETH E. GROSS, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) This is an Action Request - Please see Paragraph 9.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: With Uzbekistan leaving the Central Asian power system, the Government of Tajikistan is threatening to cut water supplies to Uzbekistan next summer if Uzbekistan does not allow transit of energy from Turkmenistan through its power grid to Tajikistan this winter. Foreign Minister Zarifi said it must do this in order to refill the Nurek reservoir, which would be emptied during the winter to supply power if Turkmen electricity does not reach Tajikistan. The Government of Tajikistan is asking the international community to intervene with Uzbekistan to persuade it not to withdraw from the Central Asian regional power system until Tajikistan can build alternate transmission routes or generation capacity to remove the need for Uzbek power transit. End Summary.

¶3. (C) While 99% of Tajikistan was suffering from an electricity blackout on November 9, Foreign Minister Zarifi called Ambassador to the MFA with only three hours' notice. When the meeting began, Zarifi referred to that morning's power outage and said that Uzbekistan's decisions to withdraw from the Central Asian power system by December 1 and not to allow further transit of electricity from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan would force Tajikistan to respond in kind. Zarifi said Uzbekistan had cut off power supplies to Tajikistan several times recently, and hinted that the latest power outage resulted from Uzbek power cuts. He said that unless Uzbekistan relented, Tajikistan would draw down the Nurek reservoir this coming winter to provide electricity to Tajikistan and withhold water from Uzbekistan in the summer of 2010 in order to fill the reservoir again. Noting that Tajikistan had always fulfilled its obligations on water supply to downstream countries, he said it would be unable to do so next summer if power from or via Uzbekistan did not arrive over the winter. (Note: The 3,000 Megawatt Nurek hydroelectric power plant provides nearly 75% of Tajikistan's electricity. End note.)

¶4. (C) Zarifi emphasized that Tajikistan did not want to take this step since it would harm all countries of the region. He said that Uzbekistan would take more water out of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya to feed its cotton farms; flow into the Aral Sea would decline, further shrinking its surface area; and more dust from its former seabed would blow eastward, coating the glaciers of the Pamirs, hastening their melt, and exacerbating water

shortages in the region.

¶ 15. (C) Zarifi said he would meet with European ambassadors later on November 9 to ask them to pressure Uzbekistan to change course. He urgently requested that the United States also press Uzbekistan to "fulfill its international obligations," saying that agreements on the Central Asian power system stipulated that members give six months notice before withdrawing. He said only outsiders could give President Karimov accurate information on the impact of his energy policies, the main aim of which were to pressure Tajikistan not to build the Roghun Dam. Uzbek officials could not tell Karimov that his policies were self-destructive, Zarifi said, because they would only lose their jobs. He claimed that the Chairman of Uzbekenergo had agreed with him that Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the common energy system was a mistake for Uzbekistan, but said he could not tell Karimov this.

¶ 16. (C) In the near term, Zarifi said that Tajikistan could survive the coming winter by drawing down the Nurek reservoir. It would complete the North-South transmission line by November 28, allowing southern Tajikistan to supply some power to Khujand and other parts of the north (but not to Penjikent or Aini), Zarifi said. In the longer term, Tajikistan would continue to build the Roghun Dam and would seek international support for a power line from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan via Afghanistan. (Note: The Qairaqum Dam is capable of providing less than one-quarter of northern Tajikistan's power needs. The rest of its electricity currently is provided from southern Tajikistan via Uzbekistan's energy grid. According to a source at the Asian Development Bank, Uzbekistan also will end this arrangement, making energy supply to the north a particularly

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dire issue this winter. End note.)

¶ 17. (C) Zarifi also raised the issues of Uzbek landmines on the Uzbek-Tajik border and the rights of ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan. Noting the many deaths and injuries caused by the mines, Zarifi asked for strong attendance at a November 16-18 conference on demining in Dushanbe. On Tajik rights in Uzbekistan, he claimed that the Uzbek Government had closed virtually all Tajik language schools in Samarkand and Bukhara, and had fired all academic and government employees who had been born in the Tajik SSR.

¶ 18. (C) Ambassador assured Zarifi that he would make sure that Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent understood the seriousness of the situation. He also said that the transit power issue would figure in his upcoming consultations in Washington and in USG dealings with the Government of Uzbekistan. Ambassador spoke later in the day with the British Ambassador, who reported that Zarifi also had summoned him and raised the same concerns. The British Ambassador said Zarifi had separately summoned the French Ambassador as representative of the European Union. As far as we and the British know, Zarifi did not approach the Russian or Chinese Ambassadors.

¶ 19. (C) Action Request: Embassy requests that Department and Embassy Tashkent approach their Uzbek interlocutors to learn Uzbekistan's intentions on power supply and transit to Tajikistan and to urge Uzbekistan to take a more conciliatory approach to regional energy needs.

¶10. (C) Comment: Facing severe electricity shortages, Tajikistan is upping the ante in its power and water disputes with Uzbekistan, explicitly threatening to reduce water supplies to Uzbekistan in response to Uzbek power interruptions and its decision to withdraw from the Central Asian power system. It is unclear how far Tajikistan could really go in carrying out its threat to cut summer water supplies to Uzbekistan. It already completely draws down the Nurek reservoir every winter to provide electricity and refills it in the summer. And every summer excess water flows over the dam; indeed, water must be released to generate electricity. So Tajikistan's threats essentially amount to continuing the status quo. Regardless of the logic, Tajikistan clearly wants to send a strong message that it can no longer tolerate Uzbek interference with its electricity supplies and is asking for the international community to intercede with Uzbekistan on its behalf. End Comment.

GROSS